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Senate

The Senate met at 12 p.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. STEVENS).

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Immortal, invisible, God only wise, You rule the Earth, sea, and sky. As we deal with Hurricane Katrina's wake-up call and the death of our 16th Supreme Court Chief Justice, steady this great land. Make us grateful for the acts of generosity and altruism we have seen in this Nation and around the world.

Help us to remember Your sovereignty as You lead us away from the dead-end streets of pointing fingers to the productive paths of self-examination.

Like the canary in the mine, may these difficult days warn us of the dangers of ignoring extreme disparities in economic and social conditions. Forgive us when we cry pathology in order to justify our own indifference. Help us to build on this opportunity to work toward liberty and justice for all.

Use our Senators as agents of Your will. Give them wisdom to know what is right and the courage to do it. As we labor to strengthen freedom in other nations, open our eyes to the invisible people on life's margins in America. Hasten the day when justice will roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.

We pray in Your Holy Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The PRESIDENT pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, there will be a period for the transaction of morning business until 12:30 p.m., with Senators permitted to speak therein up to 5 minutes each.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

SCHEDULE

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, I have a few housekeeping matters as we begin today.

I have talked to the Democratic leader and a number of our colleagues about changes we have made in our current schedule. As all Members are aware, on July 29 we filed cloture motions on two items that were scheduled for consideration today. In light of Hurricane Katrina, we will be shifting our focus this week, and I am prepared to make those changes by unanimous consent.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

First, I ask unanimous consent that the two cloture votes scheduled for 5:30 this afternoon be vitiated.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Is there objection? Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, I also ask unanimous consent that the order be modified so that at 2:15 today, the Senate begin a period for morning business with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each, with the time until 5:30 equally divided between the two leaders or their designees.

I further ask consent that at 5:30 today, the Senate proceed to a vote on adoption of a resolution related to Hurricane Katrina.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, Senators should be aware that now the vote at 5:30 today will occur on the resolution expressing condolences to the victims of Katrina. I expect that a number of our colleagues will want to speak today on that resolution, and we have provided time to do so between 2:15 and 5:30 today.

In addition, following that vote, at 6 p.m. this evening there will be an all-Senators briefing related to our Gulf States. At that briefing will be a number of the Cabinet Secretaries who will be available. That briefing will be in S-407 in the Capitol.

As I have been stating, it is our intention to move very quickly, responsibly, and aggressively to Hurricane Katrina and her aftermath. This relief is underway. We need to make sure that we are maximally supportive and responsive in a timely fashion. I believe we demonstrated that last Thursday when we came in in an urgent session to approve \$10.5 billion which subsequently became law and was signed by the President.

Later today—again another manifestation of being able and appropriately responding to the changing events—we will clear a bill known as the Federal Judiciary Emergency Special Sessions Authority which will allow the affected U.S. courts to conduct business under these emergency conditions.

Tomorrow, we will pay tribute to the Chief Justice of the United States, William Rehnquist. I will say more later today on the schedule as it relates to the funeral and a Senate resolution relating to Chief Justice Rehnquist.

Finally, we will be turning to the Commerce, Justice and Science appropriations bill later this week. That appropriations measure does fund a number of hurricane-related activities.

Earlier today, the Democratic leader and I, Chairman SPECTER, and Ranking Member LEAHY from the Judiciary Committee outlined the schedule with

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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regard to Judge Roberts' hearings and the nomination process over the next month. Those hearings will begin Monday, September 12, at noon. The committee will report out Judge Roberts no later than Thursday, September 22. We will begin Senate floor consideration the week of September 26, and we will complete action no later than Friday, September 30.

I believe that is relatively complete in terms of the changes we have made in response to two very sad and unfortunate events: Hurricane Katrina, a natural disaster which is ongoing, as we all know, and the death of Chief Justice Rehnquist. We will remain flexible in terms of our scheduling in this body to address that natural catastrophe along the Gulf States. We will be acting in a bipartisan and bicameral way, as has been seen to date, in these matters in order to facilitate an immediate response initially to the victims and then ultimately to the recovery and rebuilding of those gulf regions, with the goal of greater prosperity than they have ever seen in the past.

KATRINA AFTERMATH AND RECOVERY EFFORTS

Mr. FRIST. I did have the opportunity to travel to the gulf coast and participate, not as a Senator but as a volunteer physician, and to see firsthand the tremendous response on the ground among our medical personnel, our health personnel, and our volunteers, but also to witness firsthand that scope of human suffering and need that was caused by last week's catastrophe, which affected those three Gulf States and indirectly affected the entire region—indeed, the entire country. What I saw was staggering. Hurricane Katrina now stands as the largest natural disaster in American history. Ninety thousand square miles, an area larger than the United Kingdom, have been utterly devastated.

Many of my colleagues have had the chance to fly over that region. As we all know, many of our colleagues and their families have been directly and personally impacted. The cities are flooded, the entire coast along southern Mississippi destroyed, towns demolished, farmlands turned to swamp, transportation, distribution channels totally wiped out, and local communication destroyed, slowly coming back but totally destroyed. Hundreds of thousands of residents affected across these three States are now displaced.

In our leadership meeting a little while ago, we went around the table. Everybody has received the displaced persons in numbers of thousands and thousands.

Many of these people have health problems, short-term and long-term problems, that must be addressed. It is going to take all of us pulling together to do this.

Secretary Leavitt, Health and Human Services Secretary, estimates

that thousands of innocent people have died in the hurricane's wake. As the floodwaters recede, more and more bodies, unfortunately, will be found—people who were unable to escape the torrential flooding that took place shortly after the hurricane struck. The loss is so profound that none of us will be able to express what we have seen or what we feel in words.

I have had a chance to be in other areas, in Sri Lanka after the tsunami and in the Darfur region in Sudan. Everybody says, Is this worse? How do you compare it? You can't compare it; all were tremendous tragedies. But I will say that what I had the chance to see there, in terms of the mass of humanity in that convention center and in the New Orleans airport, I can't compare it to anything I have seen, even having seen such tragedies elsewhere in the world.

One of the other things I need to mention early on is that human connection you do see when you are in the middle of a response such as this—the compassion, the concern. You saw patients lying together on scores and scores of stretchers, hundreds of stretchers that were on the floor, and you have one patient leaning over, taking care of another patient even though they didn't know each other. Patients were taking care of themselves, especially early on when there was a clear shortage of personnel to respond to that initial disaster, as people came flowing into the airport.

You had rescue workers from all walks of life, volunteers from college campuses, health personnel from what are called DMAT or disaster medical assistance teams from around the country, all enduring crushing heat and exhaustion to pour out their hearts and use those skills they had, whatever those skills, so we could maximize that response to those people being evacuated from this place.

Volunteer workers were from the State of the distinguished President pro tempore, the State of Alaska. I had the opportunity to work side by side with them, and with volunteers from Hawaii and from Tennessee. I saw a number of my colleagues from medical college, from Vanderbilt in Nashville, and Boston, MA, where I worked in the past. They were contributing in such a positive way.

Many people were so moved by the stories they read they got on the road and went to that Gulf State region to volunteer their services. They didn't ask; they didn't pay attention to the redtape or people who said stay away, and went in. They were all very useful as they poured out their hearts to those who were suffering from this catastrophe.

I have to also mention the Knox County Volunteers, because the sheriff's department there sent down several helicopters early on, again before even being asked, and they were very instrumental in dropping food and dropping supplies and helping people

trying to evacuate their homes. I had the opportunity to spend a lot of time with them for both days, both at the convention center where we spent time, as well as at the New Orleans airport and, indeed, over in Mobile, AL. They were there and all along the Mississippi coast, as we touched down there.

I will have more to say about what I have been able to observe in those experiences because I think it does reflect both the misery but also the great compassion and the pulling together, the great spirit of the American people that we are going to absolutely have to call upon as we continue to address this tragedy.

We in the Senate are acting. We are acting aggressively and responsively and early. We are going to continue to do so. This has become our major priority, even though there are a lot of other issues we are addressing. We have the skyrocketing energy prices, gasoline prices, and oil prices. We have the ongoing war in Iraq. We have the judicial nomination which is underway. And we have the response to Katrina. The response to Katrina right now, because it is an ongoing catastrophe, an ongoing natural disaster, needs to be first and foremost. We are acting and we are going to continue to act aggressively.

Last Thursday night we came in and the Democratic leader and I helped usher through, in a highly unusual emergency session, the \$10.5 billion aid bill. As we said then, that was only the beginning. We have so many urgent responsibilities now that we will be working together in a bipartisan way to address these issues.

Last Tuesday we sent out a note to all committee chairmen to begin bringing their legislative proposals to us. Over the next 48 hours we will be talking to each of the chairmen and ranking members, to pull together their ideas both for the immediate response and the midterm response and the long-term response. There are a lot of human, practical needs that have to be addressed right now. The Federal Government has a major role as we look at health and we look at social services and we look at housing and we look at food and we look at shelter, and then, in the longer term, solutions to putting the Gulf Coast back on a fast track to recovery and to rebuild, and rebuild with a goal of even greater prosperity in the future.

The Energy Committee is conducting hearings today and will be addressing the supply/demand issues. There will be many more hearings addressing these issues. I have encouraged our Members to look at some of these real warning flags that have arisen, things such as the price gouging and excessive profit taking by energy companies and by oil companies. These are issues we have to be aggressive with, especially in this time of need.

Even before the hurricane hit, having spent about 2 weeks traveling across